Tester

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Global Hawk finds new nest

Unmanned aircraft lands at Pax River

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Photo by Mike Wilson

The Global Hawk touches down at its new home, NAS Patuxent River.

The U.S. Navy's first Global Hawk unmanned air system (UAS), N-1, an RQ-4A (BuNo 166509), arrived here Tuesday, its new home. The vehicle is one of two RQ-4A aircraft that the Navy has acquired through the Global Hawk Maritime Demonstration (GHMD) program under the management of the Navy's UAS program office, PMA-263.

The GHMD N-1 aircraft, operated by test squadron VX-20, with support from a Navy-contractor integrated product team, will help develop Navy concepts of operations, and tactics, techniques and procedures to support integration of a persistent unmanned Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability into the fleet. The GHMD program's Global Hawk represents the largest and most advanced unmanned system in the American military.

With the arrival at Patuxent River, the GHMD team will first complete local area system checkout and training. Then, work ups begin in preparation for the Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment (JEFX) set for April 2006. JEFX 06 is an Air Force Chief of Staff directed series of experiments that combines live, virtual and constructive air, space and ground force simulations. Operated from Patuxent River for this upcoming experiment, GHMD N-1 will demonstrate the utility of a high altitude, long endurance UAS equipped with sensors to collect and share persistent maritime ISR data and enhance maritime domain awareness for U.S. Northern Command and other federal agencies.

Since its first flight Oct. 6, 2004, GHMD N-1 has logged more than 200 flight hours. In addition to the normal checkout flights performed on any military aircraft, N-1 has flown from Edwards Air Force Base to characterize the performance of Navy-specific sensor modifi-

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cations, and participated in the Navy's Trident Warrior 05 experiment. In an example of inter-service cooperation, N-1 has also supported a wide range of tests and training for the Air Force, freeing up its assets for activities overseas.

Capt. Paul Morgan, program manager for PMA-263 said, "I offer great credit to this government/industry team for the countless hours and immeasurable effort to bring this vehicle home. The Navy now has its greatest opportunity yet, to fully understand and harness the potential of a marinized, high-altitude, long endurance UAS. I look forward to the coming months with great anticipation."

Originally manufactured for the Air Force by Northrop-Grumman, the Global Hawk aircraft is 44-feet long, has a 116-foot wingspan and weighs 25,600 lbs. It can operate at altitudes in excess of 60,000 ft., and remain aloft for 30 hours. These Navy aircraft and their associated ground control stations incorporate enhanced equipment and software that goes a step beyond their Air Force counterparts — allowing worldwide, specialized Navy operations over the open oceans.

Photo by Bryan Jaffe